

ESOL Basics with Preliterate Learners

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Agenda

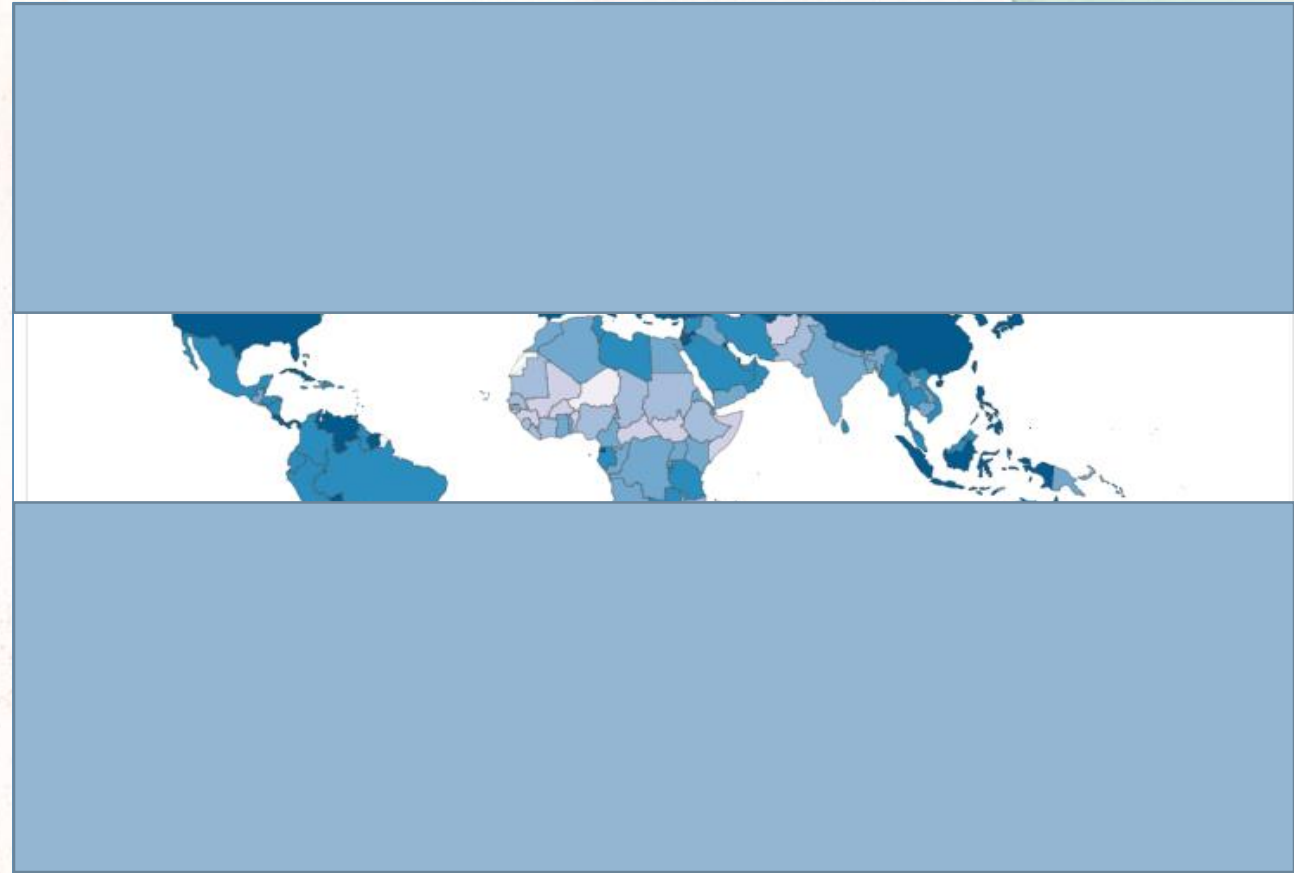
- Understanding the preliterate learner
- Strategies for working with preliterate learners
- Activities to use in your lessons



Understanding the preliterate learner

Literacy Worldwide

- According to Our World In Data, about 14% of the world's population is functionally or completely illiterate
 - That means there are over a billion people worldwide who cannot read and write well
 - In Afghanistan, about 38% of adults over age 15 are literate in their first language



Where students start


1. Pre-literate because the L1 has no written form or is in the process of developing a written form,
2. Nonliterate, having had no access to literacy instruction due to war, famine, economic issues, etc.,
3. Semiliterate, having limited access to literacy instruction, such as a few years of formal schooling,
4. Non-alphabetic literate, being literate in a language written in a non-alphabetic script (i.e. logographies like Chinese and Japanese kanji, or syllabaries like Japanese kana, Korean),
5. Non-Latin alphabetic literate, being literate in a language written in a non-Latin alphabet (i.e. abugidas of Burmese, Thai, and Tamil, or abjads such as Arabic, or alphabets like Cyrillic),
6. Latin alphabetic literate, being literate in a language written in the Latin alphabet (though some have symbols we don't use in English such as č in some Slavic languages or ç in French and Portuguese)

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Why aren't students literate in their first language?

- Political reasons
 - War
 - Genocide
 - Famine
 - Forced migrations
- Poverty
- Culture
 - Women aren't allowed to go to school in some cultures
 - Ethnic oppression limits or prohibits education



Strategies for working with preliterate learners

Phonemes

- the smallest unit of sound
- *Dog* has three phonemes /d/ /ô/ /g/
- I will be using the American Heritage Dictionary system for my symbols (chart in handouts)
- Phonemes will be written inside forwards slashes / /
- There are around 48 phonemes in American English*

*It depends on who you ask, could be as few as 40 or as many as 50.

Graphemes

- the smallest unit of writing
- *Dog* has three graphemes: “d” “o” “g”
- Graphemes will be written inside quotation marks “ “

Graphemes

- Graphemes are combined to create words
 - Words, when used as examples, will be in *italics*

Phonemes

/d/ /ô/ /g/

Graphemes

“d” “o” “g”

Word

dog

Print Awareness

- Being able to recognize the role and function of print
- Being comfortable with a pen or pencil
- Being able recognize letters and numbers in the Latin alphabet
- Being able to recognize high-frequency site words

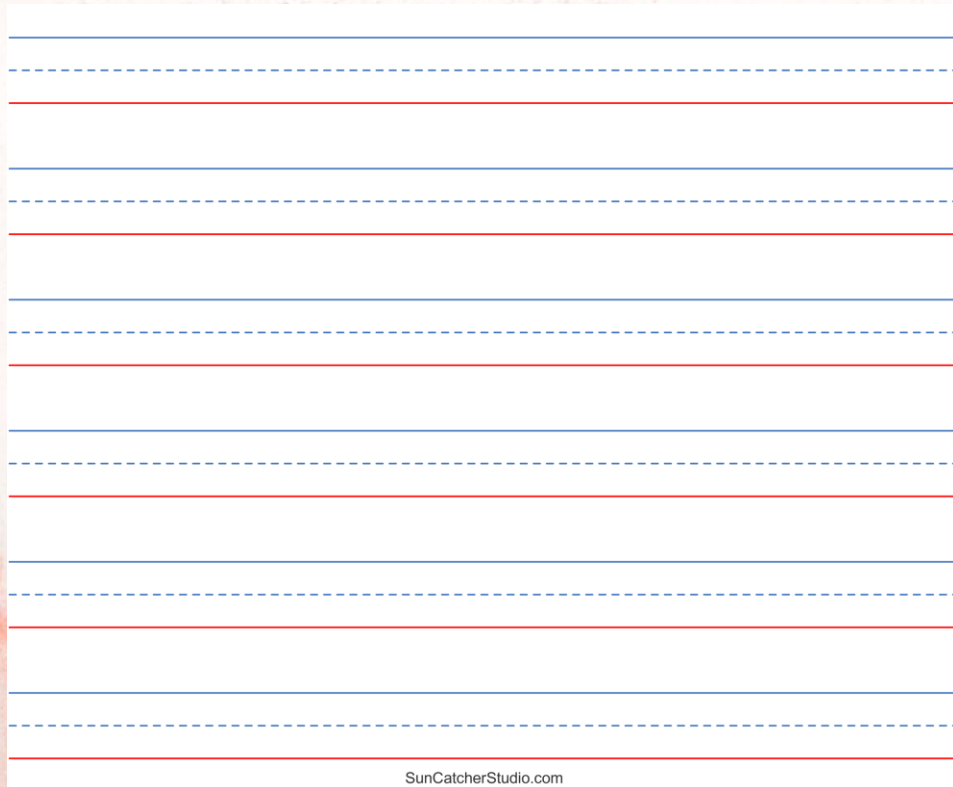
Print Awareness

Teacher may need to teach:

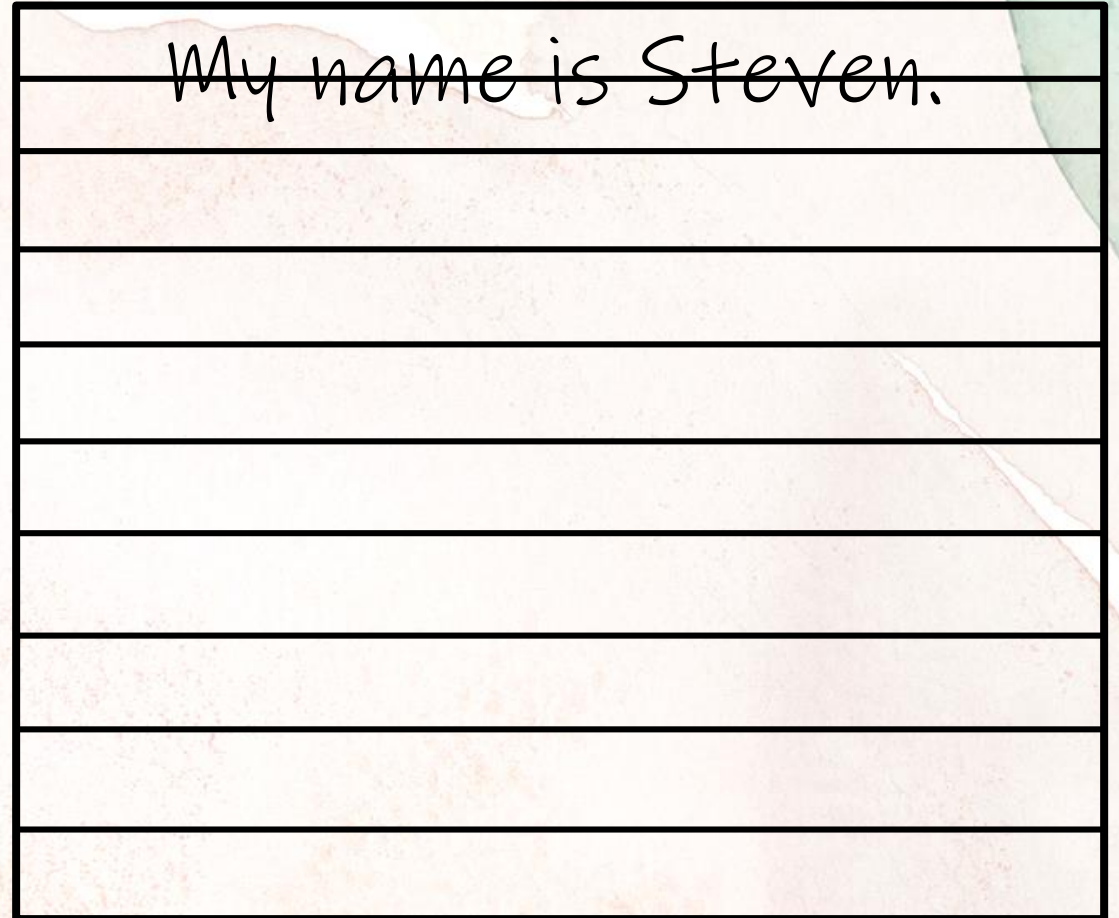
- The direction of the written language
 - Some languages go right-to-left (i.e. Arabic, Dari, Pashto, Urdu)
 - Some go vertically top-to-bottom (Traditionally, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese are written vertically, but most have a horizontal writing style now)

Print Awareness

- The location of the words on the line



A series of ten horizontal lines for handwriting practice. Each line set consists of a solid blue top line, a dashed blue middle line, and a solid red bottom line.



A series of ten horizontal lines for handwriting practice, enclosed in a black rectangular border. The first line contains the handwritten text "My name is Steven." in black ink. The remaining nine lines are empty.

Print Awareness

This means something:

- English uses the Latin alphabet.

This does not:

- 🚩●❖♦♦ ∞❄️✦ \$%&^%\$&
@*((*&^)_!@<>":



Do not dive headfirst into the
alphabet

Imagine being presented this:

Arabic abjad

ا	ب	ت	ث	ج	ح	خ
د	ذ	ر	ز	س	ش	ص
ض	ط	ظ	ع	غ	ف	ق
ك	ل	م	ن	هـ	و	ي

Burmese abugida

က	ခ	ဂ	ဃ	င
စ	ဆ	ဇ	ဈ	ည
ဋ	ဌ	ဍ	ဎ	ဏ
တ	ထ	ဒ	ဓ	န
ပ	ဖ	ဗ	ဘ	မ
ယ	ရ	လ	ဝ	သ
ဟ	ဌ	အ		



ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

What letter is this?

F f

F f

F f

F f

Imagine being presented this:

بِسْمِ

بِسْمِ
الْحَمْدِ



|

○

⌋

Vocabulary

- Concrete nouns are learned quickest
 - The mind will “map” the word to the object
- Action verbs take a little longer
 - The mind must connect the action to the word
 - Can be trickier if the action is short
 - Stative verbs take longer
- Adjectives take even longer
 - The mind must connect the word to a specific characteristic of another object (word)

Vocabulary

- Repetition

- Some research shows a new word must be heard and produced a MINIMUM of 12 times before it becomes part of the learner's long-term memory
- Comprehension/recognition can be gained in fewer repetitions
- Children and some literate adults can do this in as few as 5 repetitions

Vocabulary – Content vs Function

Content

- Carry descriptive meaning
- Include:
 - Nouns
 - Verbs
 - Adjectives
 - Adverbs

Function

- Show the relationship to other words in the sentence or perform a practical, grammatical task in the sentence
 - Determiners
 - Conjunctions
 - Prepositions
 - Pronouns
 - Modals & Auxiliary verbs
 - Qualifiers
 - Question words

Vocabulary – Content vs Function

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

– Nelson Mandela

Vocabulary – Content vs Function

According to James Pennebaker, "function words account for less than one-tenth of 1 percent of your vocabulary but make up almost 60 percent of the words you use."

Vocabulary – Use pictures

- Mutual exclusivity
- We tend to learn new vocabulary on a one-object-one-word basis



Vocabulary – Use pictures



Vocabulary – Pantomime

- Acting out verbs can be most helpful
- Use gestures and actions to reinforce the new words

Vocabulary – use videos/animation



The background of the image is a soft, abstract watercolor wash in shades of peach, cream, and light green. A solid, light blue rectangular box is positioned in the center, serving as a backdrop for the text.

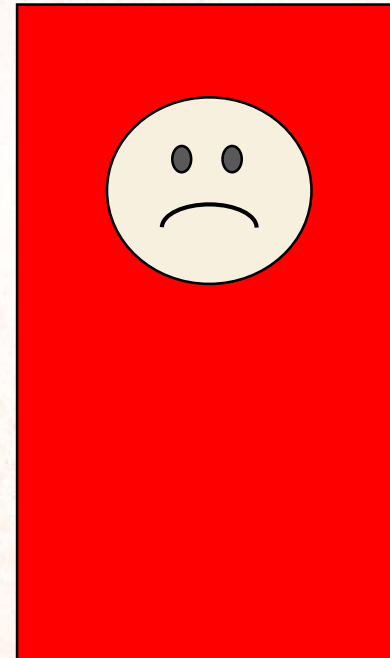
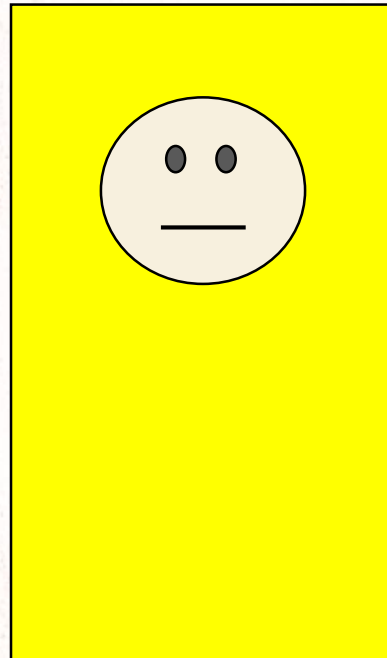
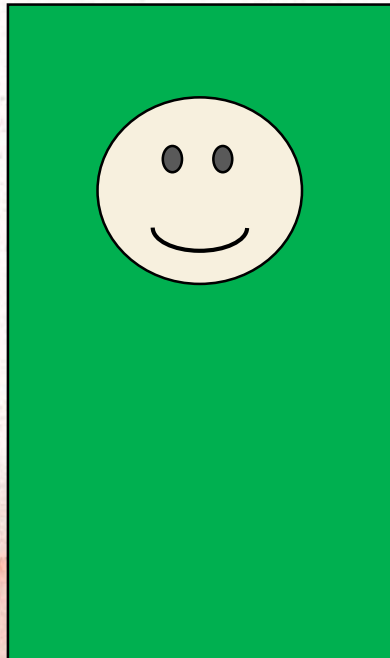
Activities to use in your lessons

Things to teach when getting started

- “yes”
- “no”
- “I do not understand.”
- “Can you repeat that?”
- “Can you slow down?”
- “What is this called?”

Check for understanding

- Have your student point to how they feel
- Have the student use a small token (a coin, a rock, an eraser) to indicate how they are feeling



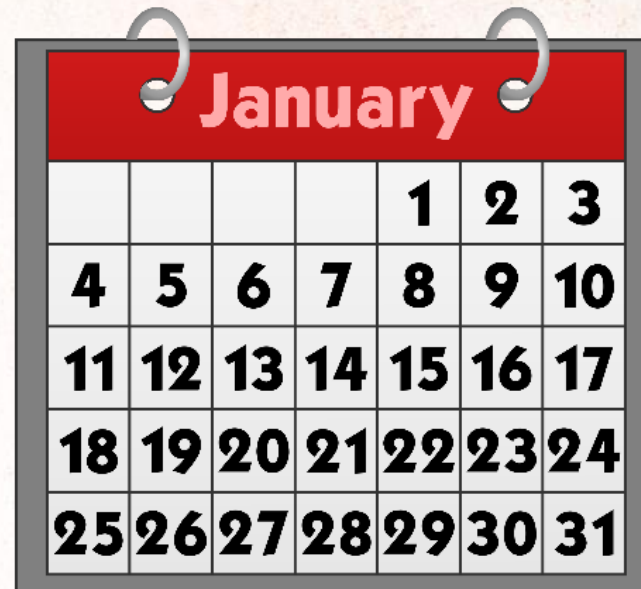
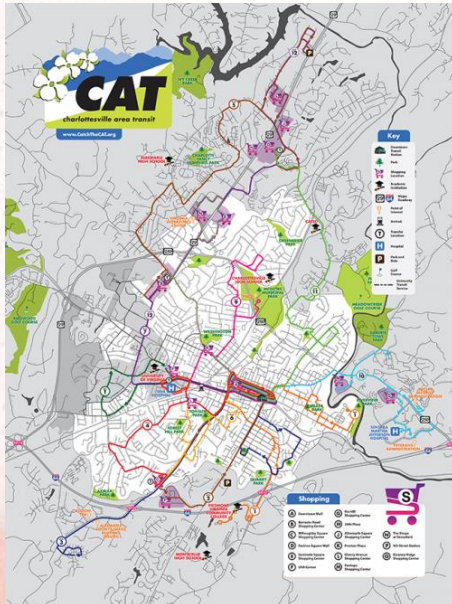
Learning new vocabulary – disambiguous method

- Show your student four pictures
 - Three are pictures of words they know
 - One is a picture of something new
 - Ask them to identify the new one by calling it by its name.
 - The student will likely assign the new name to the unknown item.



Use of realia

- Use props that your student can see and touch



Identifying words and letters

Which are the same?

bed bad bed beds

pog dog dog bog

tap tap tab tad

Which are different?

sent send sent sent

spell spell spill spell

list list list fist

Circle the correct word

by bus

by car



by bus

by car



Using cloze activities

___other

D
M
R



___ather

T
J
F



Comprehension Checks Yes/No

- Open ended questions may be too complex:
 - “Where is she?” requires more vocabulary from the student.
- Yes/No questions limits the requirements for the student
 - “Is she at the store?”
 - “Is she at the bank?”
 - “Is she at the post office?”
- Depending on level, student could answer with one word, or in a complete sentence



Comprehension Check – Either/Or

- Limit the possible number of answers by asking either/or questions.
- “Is she at the bank or the pharmacy?”
- “Is he on the bus or on a train?”



Picture based experience story

- Student takes pictures of themselves doing a task.
- Student or tutor prints out the pictures.
- Student tells the tutor what is happening in each picture while tutor writes the story.
- They edit together.

Questions



In the chat:

- What is one thing your learned today?
- What is your favorite thing about working with a low level learner?

